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Contesting Neoliberal Urbanism in Glasgow's Community Gardens: The Practice of DIY Citizenship

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Abstract:

In this journal, it has been suggested that citizens practising community gardening “can become complicit in the construction of neoliberal hegemony”. Such hegemony is maintained, it is argued, through the day-to-day work of neoliberal citizen-subjects, which “alleviates the state from service provision”. In this paper we acknowledge that community gardens are vulnerable to neoliberal cooptation. But, even where neoliberal practices are evidenced, such practices do not define or foreclose other socio-political subjectivities at work in the gardens. We contend that community gardens in Glasgow cultivate collective practices that offer us a glimpse of what a progressively transformative polity can achieve. Enabled by an interlocking process of community and spatial production, this form of citizen participation encourages us to reconsider our relationships with one another, our environment and what constitutes effective political practice. Inspired by a range of writings on citizenship formation we term this “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) Citizenship.

Keywords: communitygardens,democracy,citizenship,neoliberalism

Introduction

In this paper we use a case study of Glasgow's community gardens to highlight the potential for alternative forms of “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) Citizenship (Hartley 1999; Ratto and Boler 2014). Our argument here is that Glasgow's community gardens promote an equality-of-participation in place and community making. This is fundamentally different from the neoliberal construction of citizenship, which aims to produce an atomized citizen subject independent of any broader social responsibility or embeddedness. As such, we argue that community garden work can be generative of progressive forms of political practice that offer us glimpses of a radical future for the urban citizenry.

Glasgow is an archetypical post-industrial city that has undergone both deindustrialization and various attempts at regenerating and reimagining the city over the past three decades (Cumbers et al. 2010; Helms and Cumbers 2006; MacLeod 2002). While elements of the city council are keen to pursue a more “green” agenda, in the context of a broader UK politics of austerity and state retrenchment, a more dominant neoliberal agenda of aggressive property-led accumulation continues to drive Glasgow's political elites (Gray and Porter 2014). Despite these unpromising political and economic circumstances, as we demonstrate, community gardening activities do offer scope for different kinds of citizenship and politics.

We have two central and interrelated aims in this paper. First, we aim to counter the overarching Marxian and other claims about capitalism as the dominant urban logic that subsumes all alternative non-capitalist urban practices. We do this by adopting an attitude of “tentative non-judgment”¹ towards Glasgow’s community gardens. Rather than adjudicate any particular project as a neoliberal induced “flanking mechanism” (Jessop 2002) or an actually existing space of “neoliberal governmentality” (Pudup 2008) we prefer to further theorize the radical possibilities nascent within the gardens. Second, we aim to illustrate the wider progressive potential of community gardens by invoking the concept of DIY Citizenship. While we are not the first to use this term (see Hartley 1999; Ratto and Boler 2014) we wish to advance the idea by spatially and materially embedding it in Glasgow’s community garden network. Our argument here is that there is much emancipatory potential in this type of citizenship formation, which is nascent within much of the collaborative organizational processes and intentional place-making practices that take form in the setting of community gardens.

We begin the paper by critiquing a growing literature that views community gardening as “garden-variety neoliberalism” (McClintock 2014:154). Subsequently we draw upon literature concerned with neoliberal citizenship, contrasting this condition with the concept of the DIY Citizen to understand the possibilities of a counter-hegemonic and autonomous community politics evolving from community garden work. We then explore these themes through the experiences of Glasgow’s community gardeners, highlighting the generative potential of the gardens as places that produce counter-hegemonic forms of political citizenship and identity.

Community Gardening, Neoliberalism, and Political Agency

In her work on community gardening in Berlin, Marit Rosol (2011:249) refers to these grassroots “enterprises” as “private activity in the public realm”. Political acceptance and support for community gardens, she contends, is an expression of “roll-out neoliberalism” (see Peck and Tickell 2002) and attendant changes in the form and function of urban governance (Rosol 2011). Taking a similar position, Rina Ghose and Margaret Pettygrove (2014:1095) argue that citizens practising community gardening, and other forms of community development, “can become complicit in the construction of neoliberal hegemony”. Writing from a North American perspective, they argue that such hegemony is maintained through the day-to-day work of neoliberal citizen-subjects (i.e. community gardeners), which “alleviates the state from service provision”. In their study of Milwaukee’s Harembree community gardens, Ghose and Pettigrove (2014:1104) go as far as suggesting that some community groups are further impoverished as a result of their volunteerism, which “requires extracting material and labour resources from already resource-poor citizens”. Adding more weight to these claims that community garden work produces a citizen complicit in neoliberal urban practices, Mary Beth Pudup (2008:1230) writes:

The agents of neoliberal roll-out gardening technologies ... are less neighbourhoods rising up to reclaim their communities and resist their marginalization and rather more a variety of non-state and quasi-state actors who deliberately organize gardens to achieve a desired transformation of individuals in place of collective resistance and/or mobilization.

Certainly, there are aspects to community gardening that fit within broader neoliberal urban governance agendas, in terms of increasingly severe welfare regimes, which erode employee rights, social rights and benefits, and simultaneously heighten precariousness and fear (Wrenn 2014), and in the sense of shifting discourses away from state provision to a more disciplinary regime of both enforcement and “faux” volunteerism. But there is also a danger here that neoliberalism is portrayed as a “hegemonic story” (Larner 2003:509) that serves to subjugate all alternatives: “an analytic category [blinding] academic commentary and critique ... to new political opportunities” (Harris 2009:61). From this perspective the voluntary work of a community group regenerating a derelict site in their neighbourhood is categorized alongside the type of “enforced” volunteerism that is increasingly part of neoliberal welfare regimes. Conflating the nuances of volunteerism in this way omits key differences concerning the physicality and location of the work, and the motivations and identities articulated through the work.

Ghose and Pettigrove (2014), Pudup (2008), and Rosol (2011) acknowledge the work of more progressive and transformative political subjectivities in the gardens, but there is the implication here that these more progressive actors, although well intentioned, are duped by state and powerful others, whose interests lie with the neoliberal project (see also Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen and Guthman 2006; Holt-Gimenez and Wang 2011). Such an impression assigns authorship of terms like “self-help”, “mutual aid” and even “community” to neoliberal protagonists. There is a tendency to recognize the autonomous agency that is present in community gardens but see this as spatially and politically marginal within broader processes of urban development. For example, the Harambee community gardens in Milwaukee, which have a predominantly African American volunteer base, Ghose and Pettigrove (2014:1096) write:

The gardens function as spaces of citizenship practice in which participants transform space according to their own interests, claim rights to space, engage in leadership and decision-making activities, contest material deprivation, and articulate collective identities. The residents of this neighbourhood have always struggled to be incorporated politically and to meet material needs, caused by the effects of racial politics and deindustrialization ... Community gardens represent a spatial strategy by which residents navigate these forms of marginalization.²

The authors separate “spatial strategy” from political strategy and in doing so undermine the transformative political potential of this spatially transformative work, essentially going on to present it as self-defeating. We suggest that the spatial form of “citizenship practice” evidenced in our research constitutes important political work. In navigating “these forms of marginalization” (Ghose and Pettigrove 2014), gardeners are involved in creating their own spatial and political cultures of organization and decision-making that

begins the process of normalizing grassroots-led forms of urban regeneration (Blay-Palmer and Donald 2006; Travaline and Hunold 2010). Rather than try to be “incorporated” into the inhospitable or even hostile political structures of the mainstream political process (Ghose and Pettigrove 2014), gardeners are self-defining what is political, and what is citizenship.

Before discussing neoliberal citizenship and our notion of DIY Citizenship in more detail, we want to stress that we accept aspects of the critique of community gardens: there are contradictory tensions. There is some evidence from our analysis of Glasgow’s community gardens that supports the tenor of some of these criticisms. As Nathan McClintock (2014:157) suggests, community gardening “can be radical and neoliberal at once”. Community gardens can promote a type of “private activity in the public realm” (Rosol 2011:249) or, more appropriately, dilute normative notions of public space by facilitating the particular interests of a group. However, dilution, understood in these terms, is specific to those community gardens that occupy well-used public spaces. Rosol’s work in Berlin, for example, is centred upon community gardens located in existing public parks. In Glasgow, most gardens occupy privately owned derelict or vacant spaces or underused (often physically enclosed) derelict or vacant public spaces and, therefore, can be seen to be promoting a type of public activity in what may otherwise be a private realm. In this sense, community gardens can progress public and community relations into previously commodified spaces. Thinking about other forces at work in community gardening we argue that Ghose and Pettigrove’s (2014) use of a particular discourse of class struggle to describe community garden volunteering is a partial reading, which undermines politically progressive motivations for this type of volunteering, particularly the potential for creating more autonomous and self-valorizing work practices (Holloway 2005). In our work in Glasgow, motivations ranged from a collective wish to re-appropriate enclosed and derelict land for community use to reconnect the self with community and environment. Far from being an experience that alienates people from their labour and the products of their labour, as Ghose and Pettigrove (2014) suggest, community garden volunteering can work towards reconstituting a relationship – long fragmented by the impositions of capitalism – between one another, our environment and the products of that relationship. We do not doubt Pudup’s (2008) suggestion that non-state and quasi-state actors “parachute” into “broken communities” with “green solutions” designed to effect behavioural change in the most “problematic” groups – the young, the unemployed, and repeat offenders, for example. However, as we will argue, there are socially and politically aware state and third sector actors involved in progressive work in Glasgow’s emerging community garden network.

On the frictional presence of progressively radical and neoliberal reformist practices at work in community gardens, McClintock (2014:157) argues there has to be both. Writing about urban agriculture more generally he contends: “it would not arise as a viable social movement without elements of both, insofar as contradictory processes of capitalism both create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion”. Our contribution to the knowledge of community gardening is to consider what possibilities exist for moving beyond the imposed obstacles of neoliberalism so that we might realize an urban environment where progressively transformative interventions in its everyday spaces are not uncommon. To do so we apply our notion of DIY Citizenship to the work

of community gardeners in Glasgow. Here we see a form of citizenship that is generative of collaborative social relations and new urban places, while also being disruptive, in unsettling neoliberalism's penchant for atomized individuals and reversing its frequently wasteful spatial practices.

From Neoliberal Citizenship to DIY Citizenship

Neoliberal Citizenship

Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (2010:298) describe neoliberal citizenship as, "performed in accordance with the entrepreneurial 'spirit', as active agents seeking to maximize their own advantage ... go freely about their business, making their own decisions and controlling their own destinies". Neoliberal citizenship is, thus, defined as one in which atomized individuals are created who are defined by market relations and their ability to act in their own self-interest, independent of any broader social responsibility or embeddedness. Given the ubiquity of the market, citizenship is conceived in contractual terms. Under these conditions the government becomes a marketized but also a repressive entity tasked both with enshrining the shift from a market economy to a market society (Sandel 2012; Wrenn 2014) and with it the disciplining of the citizen as an individualized consumer.

The flipside of this form of the citizenship contract is that government owes less to its citizens. For example, Aihwa Ong (2006:501) describes the UK government under Tony Blair as "no longer interested in taking care of every citizen [preferring] him/her to act as a free subject who self-actualizes and relies on autonomous action to confront global insecurities". Those citizens unable to fulfil their role as consumers receive disciplining through workfare, benefit reduction and increasingly punitive sanctions. But, as Andrew Gordon and Trevor Stack (2007:130) argue, "neoliberal states have failed to produce the 'free subject who self-actualizes' precisely because they have continued to act as states by reserving their rights on citizenship". Thomas Simon (2013) expands this notion of state manipulation of citizenship in more combative tones by referring to citizenship "as a weapon" used by the state against insiders and outsiders. Look to the Calais "Jungle Camps", which hold thousands of economic and war migrants, to get a vivid example of the "outsider". For examples of the subjugated "insider", see women and the working classes. In effect, both groups cede much of their collective power to be recognized as individual citizens (Gulülp 2013; Pateman 1991; Phillips 1992). What we see in these insider/outsider examples is an unequal distribution of neoliberal citizenship rights. Citizenship is supposed to be inextricably tied to democracy but the kind of citizen emerging under neoliberalism has limited democratic capacity and increasingly does not enjoy real freedom, despite the libertarian rhetoric.

Struggling to Find a Place Among the Neoliberal Citizenry

The everyday spatial reality for many Glaswegians struggling to find their place among the neoliberal citizenry is one of dereliction, precarity and impotency (in the sense of having little or no influence over key spatial decisions concerning their neighbourhoods). Yet, as John Holloway (2010) argues, there are cracks in this reality: community

gardening is particularly high in old industrial cities where the loss of manufacturing industry has resulted in significant areas of unused space. Glasgow is a particularly pertinent case with 1300 ha of vacant and derelict land, representing 4% of its total land area and comprising 925 individual sites. As a result, over 60% of Glasgow's population lives within 500m of a derelict site (Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey 2013). Most of this vacant and derelict land is in the more deprived areas of the city, thus disproportionately affecting the poorest citizens. These communities suffer from diet-related ill health, relatively high levels of unemployment and under-employment, relatively low incomes, and in some instances, severe poverty, as evidenced in the increasing reliance upon, and use of, food banks.³

Researchers working in the urban environment argue that urban dwellers experience a range of adverse effects from living in close proximity to derelict sites. Andrew Wallace talks about the “policy precarity” (2015:519) of neighbourhood restructuring in the UK that results in “partially constructed neighbourhoods” whose tenants are treated as a “lumpen problem as the vicissitudes of capital and vagaries of regeneration politics shape-shift to embrace abandonment” (2015:536). This moves our understanding of precarity beyond a feature of contemporary working life to the very contours of the urban environment. This work compliments Loïc Wacquant's theory of “territorial stigmatization” and the “dissolution of place” (2007:69), in which a rich narrative of place, with its “shared emotions, joint meanings, supported by practices and institutions of mutuality” (2007:70) is replaced with the emptiness we associate with “space”. For Dennis Smith (1987:297) “spaces are potential voids ... possible threats ... areas that have to be feared, secured, or fled”. Now as problem spaces, the idea that “something has to be done about this” becomes *de rigueur*. In Glasgow, as in many other post-industrial cities, territorial stigmatization bolsters arguments for state-led market interventions to fix the “problem”.

There has been official acknowledgement of the failure of top-down regeneration and business-led initiatives in addressing Glasgow's underlying structural problems (Gray and Porter 2014), and sustainability is now receiving greater attention in urban renewal agendas. In recognition of this, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council (GCC) are exploring a number of policy proposals designed to facilitate bottom-up approaches to the urban inequalities discussed here (e.g. Scottish Government 2012). As discussed earlier, such government proposals are frequently treated with suspicion in that they may be consistent with a wider neoliberal urban agenda. While we do not dismiss these claims outright, we question the implication that citizen participation of the “grassroots” type and citizen collaboration with other institutions in urban renewal projects can unproblematically be couched as part of the neoliberal toolbox.

Our discussion of the precariousness of top-down neighbourhood restructuring and the dissolution of place, points towards a pressing need – from progressive actors of all institutional backgrounds – for creative social, political and economic ideas that put communities at the heart of problem solving and planning, countering successive UK and Scottish governments' penchant for technocratic and market-led solutions. The organizational qualities of many of Glasgow's community gardens, and the socio-political sensibilities generated through these organizational practices, we believe, begin to address

this need. Before discussing these qualities and sensibilities within the context of our empirical work, we want to further elucidate our notion of DIY Citizenship. Using this conception to frame our analysis, we believe, emphasizes existing and potential benefits of community gardening activities for individuals, groups and the city more broadly.

DIY Citizenship

Membership of a polity, based on a system of rights and obligations is important because individuals and vulnerable groups need protection from powerful forces that would (and do) exploit and oppress them. We argue that this system of protection should be constructed from the bottom-up. We believe that a more progressive and collective form of citizenship formation is evident in the practices of community gardening. Community gardeners in Glasgow, as we will demonstrate, are engaging in a form of political participation. Through a process of learning by being in the presence of difference – different ideas, cultures, social classes, etc. – community gardeners have the potential to sculpt their own identity and their environment and, as such, their understanding of what citizenship entails. Synonymous with our notion of DIY Citizenship, this form of political participation constitutes an interdependent set of relations between people, organizational processes, institutions and intentional place making.

In his foundational study of television watching, John Hartley (1999:178) describes DIY Citizenship as:

The practice of putting together an identity from the available choices, patterns and opportunities ... no longer simply a matter of social contract between state and subject, no longer even a matter of acculturation to the heritage of a given community, DIY Citizenship is a choice people can make for themselves.

In terms of thinking beyond dominant notions of citizenship, Hartley's concept is useful as a starting point. It separates the state from the subject and in doing so foregrounds the importance of autonomous thought in the process of citizenship formation. Various authors, however, highlight that autonomous thought and action cannot be fully separated from social structures, of both the past and present (Giddens 1984; Holloway 2005; Klein and Kleinman 2002; Latour and Weibel 2005). The implication here is that Hartley's DIY Citizen, although useful, remains an atomized subject. Mike Ananny (2014:362) recognizes this flaw. Problematizing the "Y" in "DIY", but remaining supportive of the concept, he writes:

It is not only about pursuing self-interests – learning what you want to know – but also about acknowledging the social and institutional contexts of those interests, environments, and conditions in which public goods circulate and from which it is impossible to extract yourself, ignore, or not care about.

DIY Citizenship here is about doing things differently. It progresses Hartley's original concept because it emphasizes this as collective work, being socially aware and

progressive in the sense of being prefigurative. That is, work that tries to produce a better future in the present, often in conflict with the nostrums of dominant political and economic actors. However, Kate Derickson (2014), critiquing a recent volume on DIY Citizenship edited by Matt Ratto and Megan Boler (2014), argues that while the insurgent sensibilities of a contemporary politics of DIY are evident, there is little engagement here with the redistributive possibilities promised in the idea of citizenship. Providing a glimpse of people “doing things differently” is useful, but “a far cry from massively disrupting the social order” (Derickson 2014:5). Ratto and Bowler’s volume moves DIY Citizenship beyond Hartley’s individualizing tendencies to focus on its disruptive qualities but, as Derickson suggests, this new incarnation is a partially collective endeavor: struggling to expand beyond the confines of its immediate environment and, as such, lives a precarious existence.

Our notion of DIY Citizenship is both an extension and critique of the ideas discussed above. We retain “DIY” because, like Hartley, we recognize the importance of individual decision-making in the formation of a new form of citizenship, but we also acknowledge the role played by social structures and institutions (including the local state) in informing those decisions. We are also drawn to the disruptive qualities of DIY Citizenship noted in recent works. Having the collective know-how and confidence to do things differently, particularly when the doing challenges dominant practices, is no small thing. Our extension of the concept centres upon a reworking of the collective form that citizenship might take. Nascent in Glasgow’s community gardens is the development of new relations between urbanites on the ground, the spaces they inhabit and a range of institutions, including the state, which cannot be unproblematically categorized as yet another manifestation of neoliberal governmentality.

Creating Alternative Narratives of Democracy and Citizenship in Glasgow’s Community Gardens

In the following sections we look more closely at the work carried out by Glasgow’s community gardeners, detailing why we understand it as progressive political activity that counters the politically disempowering and socially damaging practices of neoliberal citizenship. First, informed by the ancient Greek condition of *paideia*, we show how the gardens themselves promote a form of civic education that emphasizes the interdependence of individual and collective life. Second, we focus on the types of social relations we see emerging in community gardens. Here we evidence a “transformative politics of encounter” (Askins 2015:473) that brings together different publics, who might not otherwise have substantive contact with one another. Finally, returning to Ananny’s (2014) concerns about the “Y” in “DIY” (see the section “DIY Citizenship” above) we emphasize the supportive role of multiple urban agencies in creating a community garden network in Glasgow.

Our empirical study took place over a six-month period between February and July 2014. Methods employed were participant observation, in the form of site visits to 16 of the city’s gardens, and semi-structured interviews with garden volunteers and staff. The gardens were heterogeneous both socially and spatially: from deprived neighbourhoods in the east, north and south, to more affluent neighbourhoods in the city’s west end. Four of

the gardens are local community-led projects with nominal input from outside organizations. The other 12 are collaborative projects involving local resident groups and a range of local government and third-sector organizations. Twenty-five interviews were conducted mainly with volunteers, but also with local government and third-sector workers involved in managing the gardens. Pseudonyms are used.

Community Gardens as Places of Collective Learning and Social Empowerment

The type of interaction between people and place that is evident in Glasgow's community gardens is generative of counter-hegemonic political ideas and practices. Importantly, it is not simply people who are generating such ideas and practices, but people in communion with space. It is in the doing of the work that counter hegemonies emerge. People are placing themselves at the heart of urban problem solving and planning; enabling a heuristic, hands-on form of learning in the urban environment. This poses fundamental questions about the need for a sovereign power to define citizenship and manage citizenship practices. Alex Prichard (2010:9) similarly questions this need:

The political discourse of citizenship is the contemporary means through which our moral obligations to one another are framed. While there is debate as to where these obligations lie, there is general consensus that this debate should be framed through the language of rights and responsibilities. The challenge is how to have this debate in the absence of a clearly determinate political centre: in the absence of a sovereign.

As a noun, "sovereign" means ruler, head of state, overlord and such like. As an adjective, "sovereign" means absolute, unrestricted and total control. As an adjective it can also mean "autonomous, self-determining, independent and free" (New Oxford American Dictionary 2010). There is a distinction between these two adjectives. Unlike the unrestricted sovereign, the self-determining sovereign promotes the idea that an individual or polity's freedom should never be conceived of as absolute. This is summed up beautifully in John Quail's comment: "until all of us are free then no one is free" (quoted in Franks 2007:129). This latter definition presents sovereign subject formation as a collective process involving a dynamic relationship between multiple overlapping centres of power – individuals and communities, however a community may be conceived. In this sense community is a pre-requisite for individuality (Prichard 2010). Bearing these insights in mind, we turn to the ancient Greek notion of *paideia* as a means to counter the absolute power of a sovereign. *Paideia*, we argue, strengthens a polycentric understanding of sovereignty and can be seen in more recent contributions, ranging from the works of John Dewey (1859–1952) to Murray Bookchin (1921–2006).

The Greek citizen ideal differed significantly from the modern. Bookchin (1992:59) tells us that citizenship "was not simply some species myth of shared heredity that united citizens of the polis with each other but a profoundly cultural conception of personal development". Translated into English, *paideia* means education, but this offers a limited explanation of the term. *Paideia* emphasizes the interdependence of individual and social life. It emphatically promotes within the individual a sense of responsibility to the social world: "*Paideia*, in effect, was a form of civic schooling as well as personal training. It

rooted civic commitment in independence of mind, philia, and a deep sense of individual responsibility” (Bookchin 1992:59). The ideal classical citizen differed from the modern “subject” because the former ruled and was ruled, “which meant ... that he was a participant in determining the laws by which he⁴ was to be bound” (Pocock 1995:29).

A similar form of civic education is evident in community garden practices in Glasgow. The community gardens we visited in our research offer a range of learning activities from cookery workshops, to film nights, to up-cycle craft workshops and place-based cultural heritage workshops. Participation at these learning events has practical implications for the gardeners. People learn about gardening but they also acquire other knowledge and skills connected to their work as community garden volunteers. This can have profound effects on individuals:

We formed a committee. That prospect was daunting for a lot of us that just wanted to dig holes in the ground ... We need four members for this and secretary for that ... What’s all that about? But you end up learning new skills. Myself I took on the role of secretary for the group and I got sent on a minute taking course and other stuff like that so I’ve gained qualifications and new skills ... I wouldn’t have known how to take minutes or how to type up minutes or how to put them in order. It wouldn’t have crossed my mind (Alistair, community garden volunteer, March 2014).

Skills and education here are linked to organizing creative work practices that build individual and community confidence and autonomy rather than being reduced to a neoliberal employability agenda. More than this, the work generates a collective set of social practices and relations in the city. Another community gardener from the east of the city alludes to ideas touched upon above regarding the importance of active involvement in collective decision-making practices:

We sort out ourselves. We have had three growing seasons and this will be our fourth. We’ve tried different models in terms of who is doing what. The one that worked last year we are going to go through with this year. We have seven raised beds so four of them are team beds. We have a perennial bed, a potato bed and a squash bed so they are communal beds. So you choose your team and agree with the team that you will also grow something communally in your team bed, usually something leafy because that is what people want a lot of ... any decisions that affect everybody we meet as a group and discuss it and come to some sort of conclusion on it (Lucy, community garden volunteer, May 2014).

In these quotes we can see a collective sense of citizenship at play, which evokes *paideia*. Consider these quotes in relation to a range of recent Scottish Government proposals. For example, “[t]he intention of the [Community Empowerment and Renewal] Bill is to strengthen opportunities for communities to take independent action to achieve their own goals and aspirations” (Scottish Government 2012:8). And, the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy Interim Report argues that “[p]articipation in and with the system is high” where “[c]ommunities can engage actively, can influence decision-

making, and hold people to account for decisions” (Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy 2014:20). As discussed above, many commentators view the “community turn” in government policy practice with suspicion. While alert to the malign aspects of “community” in neoliberal discourse, we proceed with the idea that this legislation is a genuine attempt at initiating a discussion about how participatory democratic processes may encourage communities to construct their own understanding of what citizenship should mean and entail.

What these gardeners are articulating is the act of participatory and direct forms of democracy. Such practices we believe move us away from the citizen as spectator – watching their environment develop without any substantive say in that development – towards an active political citizen involved in the collective production and continuous maintenance of their environment. These quotes also suggest that democracy cannot be jettisoned into communities overnight. People cannot be expected to suddenly become proficient collective decision-makers. The neoliberal urban environment – its landscapes and timescapes – tends to inhibit rather than encourage such practices. “Garden-variety” democracy is a heuristic and collective learning process, like *paideia*, inextricably connected to the emotional and physical environments within which the learning takes place. Under these conditions the unity of the polity is something collectively built, as opposed to being a “species myth of a shared heredity” (Bookchin 1992:59).

It should be noted that the level of participatory decision-making varies across Glasgow’s gardens with larger local government or third sector-led gardens more top-down in this regard. That being said, even in these gardens there are opportunities for volunteers to take the lead in particular areas – for example, organizing community film nights, suggesting and/or organizing particular workshops, designing areas of the garden.

Community Gardening and the Forging of Progressively Transformative Social Relations in the City

To equate community gardening with the notion of citizenship may seem at best exaggerated, and at worst misguided and misleading. For some, the value afforded to political practices diminishes the closer those practices get to the ground. Thankfully, not all share this limited notion of “the political”. Consider the first state-sanctioned community gardens in the US. Initiated by the US government in the late 19th century, community gardens were perceived by state actors as cultural assimilation spaces, where “new immigrants would assume an industrious persona and learn the American way” (Bassett, quoted in Eizenberg 2010:23). Today in Glasgow, asylum seekers and other ethnic minorities find their way to community gardens, often via government agencies. For example:

I have eight people in my taskforce. Most don’t have English as their first language. There is Roma, Czech Republic ... I also have someone from Ghana, someone from Gambia, someone from Eritrea ... When we had young refugees and asylum seekers last week it was fascinating the things they were telling us about wild garlic, and making soup, and how they would use various herbs in their culture (Gillian, community garden sessional worker, March

2014).

Whatever the underlying rationale of social services, the above quote suggests that there has been a trend towards positive recognition and celebration of different cultures within gardens in the city. This resonates with a number of the gardens we visited. Efrat Eizenberg (2012:773) supports this argument. In the context of New York City's community gardens she writes: "While the mechanism of a melting pot *de facto* aims at flattening differences and assimilation into the hegemonic culture, in their current phase community gardens celebrate past experiences and revive cultural practices rather than repressing them".

In developing the theory of cosmopolitanism, Dean Garratt and Heather Piper (2010) draw our attention to the relationship between citizenship formation, community building and face-to-face relations (see also Beck 2007; Bonham 2004; Osler and Starkey 2001). Referring to Ulrich Beck's (2007) theory of "methodological cosmopolitanism ... an imagining of alternative paths within and between different cultures and modernities", Garratt and Piper contend that face-to-face constructions of citizenship "represent an aspirational ideal of what citizenship can become, beyond and distinct from a sterile fixation on the binary logic that underpins the empirical investigation of globalization" (2012:50). In this sense, DIY Citizenship holds the potential of dismantling conceptual and geographical boundaries between the local and the global and pre-determined views on what constitutes an outsider.

It is important to point out that in foregrounding citizenship here as a politics of difference (term borrowed from Young 1990), we are not simply talking about a coming together of ethno-cultural differences. Consider the following research diary extracts:

Crownpoint Garden had a broad appeal. As one volunteer told me, "yi git awesorts a characters innis place": homeless people, people with physical and learning disabilities, professionals and children from the local nursery. According to one volunteer it [the garden] has good growing potential and provided a good yield last season. The St Mungos' high school pupils, who have a raised bed on the garden, supported this position, telling me last seasons yield was regularly used by the school's catering service (extract from research diary, 14 March 2014).

As well as a 784 m² (0.192 ac) raised bed site facilitating 20 local community plot holders the 3Hills Garden includes an NHS Mental Health garden with eight raised beds, an orchard with 20 apple, pear and cherry trees, a sensory garden (which also acts as an outdoor story telling space) for nursery children, and two further adventure gardens – one for the nursery and one for the primary school kids (extract from research diary, 31 March 2014).

The foregoing gives a sense of the diverse groups that use community gardens.

Considering such diversity in close proximity, one might expect a significant degree of conflict emerging. This was not evidenced in our research. When asked where the challenges arise, participants most commonly pointed towards external pressures, that is, accessing funding, securing land tenure, vandalism. In their use of these gardens, a range of groups, who might otherwise have little substantive contact with one another, meet and exchange ideas and stories as they collectively produce new urban spaces. Use value here produces an environment that seems to promote social cohesion as opposed to fragmentation. Furthermore, the values generated are distinct from those of the neoliberal citizen, who views space as a quantifiable and commodifiable object, something to be enclosed and privatized. These activities also serve to greatly empower individuals and communities in their everyday lives in the city by giving them new forms of agency in the spaces of the gardens.

At one of our garden visits a researcher met and worked with a community gardener who is best described as a “survivor”. Living with epilepsy, a childhood marked by physical and emotional abuse and adult life struggling with drug and alcohol misuse, this participant told the researcher that working in the gardens had saved their life:

The stories I was told by Aleck, the time he spent with me as we tended to lots of little jobs – like fixing the protective mesh over a raised bed, harvesting the broccoli beds, picking up litter, and emptying leaves into the compost heap – was, for me, a humbling and inspiring experience. I’m glad we went for a walk around the garden (extract from research diary, 10 April 2014).

Before going out into the garden Aleck gave an interview in a small office that acts as the administrative hub and storage space for various tools for this particular garden. It is important to note that Aleck was more at ease with conversation while out in the gardens than in the office. This is not uncommon. Interviews always contain an element of formality and express a degree of division between researcher and participant that one, if not both, are uncomfortable with. In highlighting a change of attitude in Aleck’s interaction with the researcher (and vice versa), we want to explore more closely why this change may have taken place. We suggest that as the material nature of the contact between the two changed, so then did the substance and quality of their conversation. This observation in itself is not groundbreaking – the variety of design evident in public and private spaces points towards a widespread and tacit acknowledgement that our environment influences our interactions with one another. However, what we suggest here is that our interactions with one another are profoundly impacted upon when we collectively produce our environment. Following Kye Askins and Rachel Pain (2011:804), we want to draw attention to the “physical nature of encounters in fostering or foreclosing interaction”. Referring to the diary extract above, in the physicality of “tending to lots of little jobs”, social barriers, pre-conceived notions of one another, gave way to a more open and reciprocal form of interaction.

Another episode further illuminates our argument. Alison spoke of her time working in a community garden that was established by a city homeless charity to provide both growing space and a safe space for homeless people to come and relax and growing space for local residents. She made an interesting and important observation: in the physical act

of gardening, tensions that existed between homeless people and residents eased. Prejudices were challenged and power relations became less fixed – that is, over time both homeless people and residents took the lead in those activities that they were most comfortable with or excelled in; conversations became more varied and no one group dominated the space. For Alison, a person who had worked with homeless people in various settings, watching this transformation in the group was a profound experience. She claimed that it was the “physical quality” of the interaction that “made the difference” (Alison, community garden staff member, 19 August 2014). Community gardeners are often in close proximity to each other. This is important, as it places local residents in direct contact with marginalized groups in society, such as the homeless, who are frequently ostracized in other circumstances. Details are important. Echoing our observations above concerning the actual “doing” of the work, the participant suggested that digging, seeding, harvesting etc., acts as a sort of counterbalance to what would be an otherwise asymmetrical relationship between homeless people and residents. Returning to Garratt and Piper’s work on citizenship and face-to-face relations, we might see the role of this counterbalance as providing space and time for people “to overcome fragmentation by developing new forms of social solidarity and cross-cutting identities” (Garrett and Piper 2010:46). Askins (2015:473) contends that meaningful encounters such as this enable community cohesion through what she refers to as a “transformative politics of encounter”:

With regards to community cohesion, a “transformative politics of encounter” incorporates a radical openness to the simultaneity of difference and similarity, to deconstruct dominant discourses that essentialise minorities as only different. This politics crucially must recognise that encounters between different groups can draw upon and reiterate socially constructed difference, but that they also have the potential to shift how we see and how we feel about our others.

It is important to note that what we are describing here are not simply a series of courteous encounters, which Gill Valentine (2008) points out do not inevitably translate into respect for difference or challenge dominant social values. Rather, what we are suggesting is that the transformative quality of these interactions is coterminous with the transformation of the physical environment. The collective and intentional production of place increases the potential for a more inclusive form of citizenship to emerge. These communities are not occupying a pre-determined environment and operating in it according to pre-determined rules and protocols. Rather, they are building a material environment according to their own culture(s), histories, desires and visions (Eizenberg 2012) and, therefore, a very different sense of urban citizenship to the neoliberal type.

Community Gardens and Progressive Local Collaborations

A high quality of life gives people, whether as individuals, families or groups, the opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings. For this they need not only an appropriate material standard of life but also appropriate management of their environment in all spheres (social, economic, institutional, cultural, physical) and appropriate administration by government (Lichfield 1996:3).

Nathaniel Lichfield and other proponents of Progressive Localism (Featherstone et al. 2012; Hall and McGarrol 2013; Healey 2011; MacKinnon et al. 2010) take on the task of thinking through what constitutes “appropriate” management of our environment and administration by government in contemporary society. In doing so they reimagine local-central governance relations as “mutually-productive and enabling” (MacKinnon et al. 2010:2). Here local authorities alongside a range of other agencies perform a supportive role in their relations with local groups. Using community gardening as an example, the dynamics of this set of relations goes something like this: people shared a vision to change a part of the urban landscape; they enact organizational processes that allow them to better synergize their ideas and establish next steps; crucial to people realizing these ideas are supportive, approachable institutions, which provide the relevant resources, e.g. knowledge, expertise, finance; this support carries on through the life of the project, but as the community garden becomes embedded in place the level of support needed diminishes. What we sketch out here is a locally led, co-produced urban regeneration, involving local and citywide organizations. It is at this point our notion of DIY Citizenship departs from previous incarnations (see Hartley 1999; Ratto and Bowler 2014) in that we emphasize the social and collective constitution of the gardens, through the role of the state, particularly in its local form, and a range of other agencies in enabling the community garden network in Glasgow. Consider the following example of the G3 Growers.

Formed in 2011, G3 Growers is in its fourth season of planting. The land at the site of their activities is heavily polluted, which has entailed the use of raised beds, one of which is dedicated to growing herbs, the others a variety of produce. The garden also has six fruit trees and three large pots growing flora planted specifically to attract and sustain bees. The Garden’s equipment includes: four composters, two of which were manufactured on site; a poly tunnel, a tool shed and a homemade greenhouse. The wall panels of the latter were made in collaboration with children from a local nursery school. G3 has approximately 40 volunteers contributing in various ways to the on going activities of the garden.

This vibrancy is not uncommon in Glasgow’s community garden network. It resonates with our discussion about DIY Citizenship as it is predicated on the collective efforts of volunteers in collaboration with local government and other agencies. A G3 volunteer explains:

Initially we were looking ... at the roof of an old bus garage and the Annex [local government Area Partnership organisation] paid for surveyors to check this all out and they came back and said it wasn’t weight-bearing. The structure wouldn’t hold the garden so we all thought ... uuhhh – a big let down that it wasn’t going to happen ... So then we spoke to Glasgow West [Housing Association] about the back court at Breeching Street – it was an old car garage so there was a lot of pollutants in the ground and all that had to be dealt with, so there was lot of scientific stuff going on right at the beginning and thank God the Annex were there because it would have just gone right over our heads (Julie, G3 volunteer, May 2014).

Here we see that the advice and assistance the G3 Growers received from the Local Government group was invaluable during the initial set-up stage of the garden. Advice ranged from helping the group understand complex planning issues relating to the project to navigating the funding landscape, and enabling access. Crucially, this “partnership” between the gardeners and this local government body continues throughout the first years of the garden. Here the state plays a supportive and enabling role as opposed to a controlling one.

Of course community gardens come in a variety of forms and there exists a diversity of arrangements organizing gardens. In Glasgow some are relatively small backcourt style gardens, volunteer only, with the catchment area for volunteers stretching no further than the immediate neighbourhood. Others are larger and employ small numbers of staff. These gardens tend to offer a wide range of classes and events, mainly centred upon the production and consumption of food but also covering local heritage, health and wellbeing and more. For example, 3Hills Community Garden, situated in almost two acres of land in the low-income neighbourhood of Priesthill on Glasgow’s south side, is a collaborative project involving a number of groups including the local nursery and primary school, Glasgow City Council and NHS Scotland. Designed as long-term holistic intervention strategy to combat relatively high levels of dietary related illness in the area, the site is made up of four connected gardens – residents’ community growing garden, primary school adventure garden, nursery kids sensory garden, NHS “Green Prescriptions” garden, and an orchard with approximately 25–30 fruit trees. Although the impact of the garden on levels of dietary-related ill health cannot be measured in the short term (the garden is only two years old) these researchers believe that the 3Hills project marks a genuine attempt by practitioners and policy makers, experts and non-experts to come together and exchange knowledge and expertise with a view to creating and sustaining an important community resource.

Conclusion

In this paper we adopted an attitude of “tentative non-judgment” towards Glasgow’s community gardens. Rather than adjudicate any particular project as a neoliberal induced “flanking mechanism” (Jessop 2002) or an actually existing space of “neoliberal governmentality” (Pudup 2008), we preferred to further theorize the radical possibilities nascent within the gardens. We did this by invoking the practice of DIY Citizenship formation. Our notion of DIY Citizenship emphasizes an interdependent set of relations between people, organizational processes, institutions and intentional place making. This is both an extension and critique of previous incarnations of the term (see Hartley 1999; Ratto and Boler 2014). What we see in Glasgow’s community gardens is evidence of DIY Citizenship formation, where new collaborative and supportive relations are being developed between urbanites on the ground, the spaces they inhabit and a range of institutions, including the state. This is not to deny the continuing dialectic present within the gardens between neoliberal appropriation and more autonomous collective agency (McClintock 2014).

As befitting our increasingly complex and diverse society, DIY Citizens, through meaningful political engagement, are involved in a continuous reworking of the

parameters of citizenship. As such, this polity is well suited to accommodate difference. They are not only promoting a more active form of citizenship to that offered by dominant conceptions; they are also attempting to address real inequalities that exist in contemporary citizenship practices. Enabled by an interlocking process of community and spatial production, this form of citizen participation should be seen as more than simply respite from the pressures of contemporary urban life outside of the gardens. This type of citizenship work encourages us to reconsider our relationships with one another, our environment and what constitutes effective political practice in the city.

The sites of such progressive practices, however, are precarious in that they are vulnerable to the development agenda that still dominates local political agendas. Glasgow is not unique in this. There is a pressure that stems from the standard economic rubric of (a particular type of) growth, which demands the commodification of place: use value is superseded by exchange value. In such an environment, activities such as community gardening will always be under-valued and, hence, sensitive to the vagaries of access rights and the effects of ongoing austerity on funding sources. It is our firm view that the policy environment should be tailored to facilitate and sustain the endeavours of community gardeners by acknowledging that use value, as manifest in the collective agency we described as part of DIY Citizenship, should be reflected in access rights and greater prioritization of funding. Such a reorientation would, we venture, render the beneficial impact of community gardening in Glasgow and elsewhere more sustainable.

Endnotes

1. George DeMartino, personal communication, 15 June 2015.
2. Racial politics are evident in Glasgow's gardens, but probably not to the extent of
3. Harembree. Wider issues resulting from deindustrialization are pertinent to Glasgow. The Trussell Trust (2014) has found that the number of people in the UK reliant upon emergency food rations provided by food banks has risen from 2814 in 2005/2006 to 913,138 (including over 330,000 children) in 2013/2014.
4. There are profound differences in our notion of paideia and the classical Greek example. Where we move away from classical Greek notions of citizenship and democracy is in the separation of the public and private spheres. Aristotle, for example, based his definition of citizenship on a strict distinction between the oikos – the private world of beings and things, managed by woman and the polis – the ideal superstructure of “pure” political interaction, managed by men. In our conception of citizenship as a relation between individuals and a polity we suggest that challenging the bifurcation of the private and public spheres, of the material and political worlds will facilitate the production of a more radical urban citizenship. This is not to say the inner workings of one's private affairs should be open to the will of the polity, however it is conceived. Rather, it is to suggest that for citizenship to be a progressively transformative force, its rights and obligations, democratically arrived at through full access to participation by the every member of the polity, should extend beyond the public sphere into our working and domestic lives.

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